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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 CONAKRY 000163

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/W
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TAGS: [EAGR](#) [ECON](#) [GV](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [SNAR](#)
SUBJECT: A PRIVATE CHAT WITH GUINEAN PRIME MINISTER LANSANA
KOUYATE

REF: A. CONAKRY 0162

[1](#)B. CONAKRY 0148

[1](#)C. CONAKRY 0155

Classified By: Ambassador Phillip Carter III for reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: On May 3, Ambassador Carter met with Prime Minister Lansana Kouyate at the EMR for 90 minutes. Kouyate, who was traveling to Kuwait that evening, had just come from a meeting with President Conte at his farm in Dubreka where the PM discussed plans for a possible cabinet reshuffle, and the creation of a government committee to address Guinea's growing food crisis. The Ambassador's meeting covered a number of topics, from the Ambassador's latest travels into Guinea's interior to Kouyate's most recent meeting with President Conte, to the current political and economic challenges facing the country. The issue of Guinea's growing narcotics trafficking problem was also raised with some surprising insights regarding the apparently strained relationship between President Conte and his eldest son Ousmane, a leading figure in the country's drug trade. END SUMMARY

Elections

[1](#)2. (U) Kouyate was clearly pleased to be meeting with the Ambassador, stating that it had been a while since he had an opportunity to exchange ideas. Noting the Ambassador's recent travels throughout the country, Kouyate asked about the Ambassador's impressions. The Ambassador told the PM that it is clear that the elections are a topic of much interest among the various groups he had met with, including local political, youth and civil society leaders. However, he shared his impression that people seem frustrated, with many feeling that the government is not doing enough to ensure that the elections will be well organized, free and fair. The Ambassador stressed the need for better communication among these different groups in the countryside, emphasizing that the regional CENI representatives and local officials (Governors and Prefects) need to define their respective roles and responsibilities in order to avoid confusion as election day approaches. According to the Ambassador, everyone seemed to be waiting for instructions from Conakry rather than initiating the necessary dialogue amongst themselves. On this score, the PM stated that he will be convening a meeting of all political parties, the CENI, the Ministry of Interior and donors to discuss what needs to be done to get the process rolling in a more determined fashion. The Ambassador told the PM that he hoped that the CENI would also receive additional funding from the government, beyond

the paltry 500 million GnP (about \$110,000) it has already received. Kouyate said that he is looking to address the CENI's budget shortfall through a supplemental allocation to the "initial" allotment.

13. (SBU) The Ambassador also noted that many interlocutors were concerned about the growing ethnic character of each of the parties as well as the parties' apparent lack of action with respect to the elections. The PM responded by saying that the issue of ethnicity is not new or unique to Guinea, but that if any party wants to build the political standing necessary to control the National Assembly or win the Presidency, it will need to garner support from all of the country's ethnic groups. He shared the Ambassador's view that even within the Malinke, Sousou, or Fulani ethnic groups, there are divisions that will likely prevent any one political party from claiming the complete support of any one ethnicity. He pushed back on the Ambassador's assertion that the parties were not preparing themselves. The PM said that while the official campaign period is legally limited to a certain number of weeks before the election, the parties are actively seeking candidates and marshaling resources. He described one recent instance where a party had imported a container of promotional materials, such as Tee-shirts and caps with logos, and sought an exemption for the \$500,000 duty imposed by customs, which he could not waive. The PM mentioned the law passed in May 2007 that obligates the Guinean Government to provide registered political parties with some public funds, and said that he had directed the Finance Minister to fulfill this obligation.

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Food Crisis

14. (C) Turning to economics, the Ambassador said that the government's recent ban on agricultural exports would likely cause more harm than good over the medium term, and would do nothing to solve the problem of rising food prices globally. The Ambassador noted that during his recent visit to the Forest Region, several producers complained about the ban. He stressed that banning exports creates a disincentive to farmers to increase production since their market is effectively cut off. Kouyate acknowledged the Ambassador's concerns, and emphasized that he is deeply committed to a liberal and open economic policy. However, he noted that, globally, there is a growing protectionist trend among countries that export agricultural commodities such as rice. He said he understood donor objections, but that the ban is an expedient necessity to support Guinean consumers who are increasingly squeezed by rising food prices. He added that local exporters deposit their profits into foreign accounts, meaning that Guinea gains little financially, if anything, from agricultural exports. The Ambassador responded that an export ban does not resolve the problem of repatriated revenues/profits, and urged the PM to focus on resolving problems that continue to inhibit local production. Kouyate stated that his government would clarify its policy to focus on certain essential staples.

15. (SBU) On the issue of food assistance, the Ambassador urged the PM to improve his government's coordination on this matter. The PM revealed that he had just left President Conte with a draft decree to establish a government steering committee on this subject, that Conte had agreed, and that the Agriculture Minister would receive the signed decree from Conte the following day.

Ministers, Governors, and Prefects

16. (SBU) The Ambassador commended the PM on his selection of Governors and Prefects, many of whom are viewed as dynamic individuals truly concerned about their communities, but pointed out that despite these appointments, people are

increasingly frustrated, viewing the government as largely ineffective. Kouyate recalled that, during a trip to Morocco shortly after he had appointed these new administrators, he was complemented by the then Moroccan PM because the majority of his prefects had received their administrative training from one of Morocco's best schools. Kouyate was unaware of this connection but later found out that the Minister of Interior had selected the prefects because of this specific training. While he said he was pleased with his governors and prefects, (with the notable exception of the Kindia Prefect who had been recently appointed by Conte and was considered a corrupt political hack - ref tel A), he added that they lacked resources and basic equipment. He said that he would be providing 50 vehicles and uniforms to these local officials to help them in their activities before the elections.

17. (C) At the national level, Kouyate said he is looking to shake up his cabinet, an idea he proposed when he had met earlier that day with Conte. Kouyate told the Ambassador that he is looking to get rid of a handful of ministers he described as "not productive" and "not loyal." He also said that he plans to restructure certain ministries that are "too heavy." He specifically mentioned the Ministries of Education; Youth, Sports, and Culture; and Industry and Commerce as those that will be split. He stated that Conte supported this idea and that upon Kouyate's return from Kuwait; the two would look at the PM's restructuring plan more closely and select new ministers. Just as important, Kouyate added that he hoped he would be able to also restructure the civil service, which is seen as a major obstacle to reform.

The Bete Noir - Ousmane Conte

18. (C) The Ambassador expressed his concerns about the growing drug trade in Guinea. Noting that until recently,

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much international attention was focused on Guinea Bissau as the first narco-state emerging in West Africa, the Ambassador said that it appears that the center of this illicit activity had now shifted to Guinea. As the Ambassador spoke, Kouyate visibly slumped in his chair, and then leaned toward the Ambassador, and said that he is aware of this problem and that the major Guinean trafficker is President Conte's son, Ousmane. He revealed that about eight months ago, an aircraft from Colombia or Venezuela was interdicted by local police at the airport in Faranah, a small city in the Middle Guinea region. When informed about the interdiction by the Minister of Interior, Kouyate instructed him to conduct a full investigation, seize the contraband and prosecute those responsible.

19. (C) A couple of days later, the Minister returned to inform the PM that the plane and its cargo had been released by the head of the National Gendarmerie, General Jacques Toure. Kouyate said he was furious and convoked Toure to his office. When initially confronted, Toure reportedly denied releasing the aircraft, but later told the PM that the illicit operation was lead by Ousmane Conte. (Bio note: Kouyate stated that he knows Toure well as they are related to each other through Kouyate's mother's family). Kouyate challenged Toure, asking him if he had informed anyone about this matter or if he had raised it with President Conte directly. Toure reportedly said he had not. Kouyate said he chastised Toure for his actions. He told the Ambassador that he then went to the First Lady, Henriette Conte, about Ousmane's complicity. Henriette reportedly described Ousmane as totally out of control, and directed the PM to take the matter up directly with the president. When Kouyate raised the incident, President Conte reportedly asked why his son would do such a thing. Kouyate told the president that it was a way for his son to get rich quickly and that it reflected poor character. Kouyate said that he reminded Conte that he had raised concerns about Ousmane years ago with the

President but that nothing had been done. Kouyate then revealed a confidence from Conte to the Ambassador, mentioning that the President has had no contact or any communication with his son in over two years. According to Kouyate, Conte stated clearly that if evidence develops that ties Ousmane to narcotics trafficking, then he should be arrested and prosecuted.

¶10. (C) Kouyate asked if the Ambassador could express his concerns about the growing drug trafficking problem in Guinea in an open and public manner, such as a letter. The PM said that such a communication would help his office to engage the President and the government about this growing problem. He also asked for whatever assistance the USG could provide to help his government interdict smugglers. The Ambassador said that he had serious concerns about corruption within Guinea's security services on this score, noting the discrepancy between a recent press article highlighting a seizure of one ton of cocaine and police stating that only 350 kilos had been found (reftels B and C). Kouyate stated that some of the police are likely involved. He added that since his arrival, over 30 police and security personnel have been arrested for crimes and corruption, and are now languishing in prison. According to Kouyate, this is unprecedented in Guinea's history. He stressed that he would work with the Ministry of Interior to ensure that "the forthright and correct police officers" would be tasked to stop any flight or ship trying to smuggle narcotics into Guinea. The Ambassador said that he would look into what he could do and that he would coordinate his efforts with his European counterparts. Kouyate repeated his request for a letter that outlined U.S. concerns about narcotics trafficking in Guinea. The Ambassador stated that he would meet the PM's request and have something for him upon his return from Kuwait.

Bilats Timing

¶11. (U) Kouyate raised the much delayed bilateral consultations, stating that he was keen to have them. When the Ambassador noted that the dated that the Foreign Ministry had offered May 21-22, would not likely work for principals in the African Bureau, the PM stated that if possible it would be better to hold them in June or July, given his own travel schedule. The Ambassador stated that he would convey

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this timeframe to Washington.

Conte

¶12. (C) As the PM was leaving, the Ambassador asked him about Conte's health. Kouyate, slowly shaking his head said that "the president's health is up and down but he is not doing well." He admitted that "it is difficult to deal with that man", revealing that he is never sure what he is thinking. The Ambassador stated that he has been hearing much criticism of the president and that he is not well regarded in the countryside. Kouyate said that one does not need to leave Conakry to hear the same thing. He said that at a opening ceremony for a new stadium at the small university in Sonfonia, the crowds jeered every time Conte's name was mentioned. According to Kouyate, he had to admonish the crowds to be respectful, particularly given that the stadium is named after President Conte. "It was incredible" he said, shaking his head again with forlorn look on his face.

Comment

¶13. (C) This was not the ebullient and positive PM of previous encounters. It is clear that political pressures and burdens of office have tempered Kouyate. His political

ambition, though constrained, remains evident. For many pundits, the PM's tenure is almost over but he is fighting to hold on to his job. His feeble attempt to excuse the export ban reveals a man willing to use populist measures for political gain even while recognizing its negative economic impact. His plans to restructure his cabinet have been long in the making and he is undoubtedly under pressure to bring some of the old guard back. He will likely use the restructuring as an opportunity to engender new alliances and support. However, given his weak standing with civil society, the unions, and the presidential entourage, a cabinet shuffle could prove his undoing, if mishandled.

CARTER

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